



**Testimony of Justin Kaiser, Legislative Program Director
Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)**

**Before the Higher Education and Employment Committee
March 5, 2019**

in support of

**H.B. No. 7162 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT OPEN
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE COORDINATING COUNCIL**

Chairman Haskell , Chairman Haddad, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today in support of H.B. 7162 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE COORDINATING COUNCIL. My name is Justin Kaiser and I am currently a senior, political science major at UConn and the Legislative Director for the ConnPIRG student organization.

I apologize for not being able to attend today, but my class schedule simply did not permit me to get to Hartford for the hearing. In addition, we are in the middle of a campus-wide referendum campaign to reaffirm the support of the student body for our UConnPIRG chapter, so all of our other volunteers are committed to activities with students on campus.

Since 1972, ConnPIRG has worked to give students the skills and opportunity to practice effective citizenship. Both on campus and out in the world, we mobilize students to investigate big social problems, come up with practical solutions, convince the media and public to pay attention, and get decision-makers to act. This particular issue is even more personal to each of us as the affordability of education is something we deal with directly.

First, I would like to publicly applaud Representative Haddad for his continued efforts on open source textbooks and college affordability. He has been a true champion in this area. We truly appreciate the collaboration with Chairman Haddad in this area which has led to a significant increase in the availability of these resources. We'd also like to recognize Senator Haskell, who despite being new to this body has championed this issue from the perspective of a recent graduate who felt the cost of high textbook prices as students all across the state of Connecticut do.

We wholly support HB 7162, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE COORDINATING COUNCIL, as another strong step in the effort to promote affordable higher education here in Connecticut. I have attached a trilogy of studies we have done on open educational resources.

A few compelling statistics from these PIRG studies:

- 65% of students have skipped buying books because of cost despite 94% understanding it would impact their grade in that class;
- \$3 billion of US financial aid goes to support the purchase of textbooks.

These efforts can make a difference in a very short time frame. Right here at home, UConn students have saved more than a \$1 million since the advent of the efforts in this area in 2016. We are also excited by the CSCU NoLo system of transparency for marking textbook materials that are no cost or low cost for student. Already, students can make decisions on courses, at least in part based on their financial impact.

Both Colorado and Massachusetts are already using statewide collaborative models to create savings for their students and to create more open educational resources. Colorado just awarded its first round of grant applications. Massachusetts is offering faculty trainings, including a stipend for attendees who attend a training and review open source materials.

We would encourage the Committee to amend the makeup of the coordinating council to include at least one student appointee. It is our belief that the student perspective is critical to the effectiveness of this effort.

Again, ConnPIRG strongly supports this proposal and looks forward to working with the Committee throughout the session. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.